

A
DISCOURSE,
Delivered on the 26th of November, 1795;
BEING THE DAY RECOMMENDED BY THE GOVERNOR OF
THE STATE OF NEW-YORK TO BE OBSERVED AS A DAY OF
THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER,
ON ACCOUNT OF THE REMOVAL OF AN
EPIDEMIC FEVER,
AND FOR OTHER
NATIONAL BLESSINGS.

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IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK.



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DISCUSSION

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Discourse was hastily drawn up for the occasion. The request of some who heard it, the misrepresentation it has suffered, and a hope that it may be useful in the present juncture of our public affairs, have induced the Author to commit it to the press. It has undergone only a few verbal alterations, or transpositions, since the delivery, with the addition of the notes.—Sufficiently aware that a Minister of the Gospel ought not to interfere in the politics of any party, he trusts that he has advanced nothing which can be reasonably so construed; nothing which is not properly in the line of his duty, and is not founded on the strictest principles of morality and religion. He trusts also,

also, that his desire to support the federal government, and to promote the continuance of national peace, will be deemed an evidence of that ardent love of liberty which he has always professed, and which, at this moment, glows in his bosom.

December, 1795.

A

DISCOURSE, &c.

PSALM cxvii.

O Praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great towards us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord.

UPON no occasion, my brethren, have I been more perplexed about the choice of a subject. Being present with you all the time of the afflictive disease, and joining with you in repeated supplications to the Throne of Grace, it was natural to wish that our gratitude might be expressed in a
manner

manner becoming our deliverance. Shall we, when distressed, pierce heaven with our cries? and shall we, when relieved, not make proper acknowledgments? The difficulty was increased by the apprehension that while we are called to render thanks for mercies, there are still tokens of the Divine displeasure toward our nation; and that this day is to be considered not only as a day of thanksgiving, but as a day on which to deprecate impending evils, and beseech the continuance of prosperity. These duties are, at no time, inconsistent with each other, and at this they appear to be more peculiarly connected.

Among the subjects which have occurred, the choice has fallen, at a late hour, on the psalm just read. It is generally believed to be a prediction of the calling of the Gentiles; and it is quoted as such
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by the Apostle, in his Epistle to the Romans.* The Psalmist excites to praise for this great and joyful event. Some distinguish between *nations* and *people*; understanding by the one the *Gentiles*, and by the other the *Jews*. When the Psalmist says, *his merciful kindness is great towards us*, some suppose that the Jews are to be understood, who were chosen of God from all other nations, and who enjoyed superior privileges. Perhaps the interpretation is rather to be preferred which includes both Jews and Gentiles, who were, in due time, gathered into one under Christ; an event justly demanding their united and highest praise.

But, though the Jews were a peculiar people, and though this psalm has a reference to the glorious days of the Gospel, when men of all kindreds, tongues, and people

* Rom. xv. 11.

people should form one spiritual kingdom, yet we are authorized to interpret it in a more extensive sense. *The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.* JEHOVAH is the King of all nations; and they are called to humble themselves under his judgments, and to acknowledge him as the Author of every favor which they enjoy. That we must not restrict the psalm, is evident from the invariable course of the Divine government in rewarding or punishing all according to their national conduct; and from these words in the 107th psalm, which extend to the whole human race; *Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

The psalm, then, is a proper expression of gratitude for any nation; and I shall discuss it with a particular reference to our own. Considering ourselves as a Christian

tian nation, we are most intimately concerned, because we are a part of those Gentiles to whom the Gospel is preached, and for which the Psalmist, with prophetic spirit, praised God in such exalted strains. I shall, *first*, mention some things for which we are called to praise the Lord, or show in what respects *his merciful kindness is great towards us*; and then conclude with a few reflections.

THE causes of thanksgiving are judiciously enumerated and arranged in the proclamation of the first Magistrate of this State. A particular attention to them all is neither necessary nor possible. Were we to go back to the protection which the Lord afforded to “our ancestors in “their first establishments in this then “savage wilderness,” we would find much matter for praise. It would be a pleasure to recount the difficulties, the

deliverances; the gradual advances to population and strength. The contrast between what this country once was and what it now is, would not fail to give adoring views of that Providence which is over all.

In like manner, were we to dwell on the late revolution, when we became a separate nation, the wonders which the Lord wrought for us must strike the most inattentive observer.

The opportunity and wisdom likewise which were given us to establish governments, and particularly our general government, have been often the subjects of celebration. It ought ever to be remembered, to the praise of God, that this government was deliberately formed and chosen; that it embraces the true republican principle of representation; contains
a pro-

a provision for amendments, if experience shall show them to be necessary; and that since its establishment, the flourishing situation of our country has abundantly proved its excellence.

Not to dilate on these, let me select a few things which require, on this day, a more attentive consideration.

FIRST, The Lord hath “ preserved us
 “ from being involved in the wars and
 “ other grievous calamities which at this
 “ moment afflict and distress many na-
 “ tions.” The continuance of peace was mentioned on the last thanksgiving as a remarkable blessing; but it is a blessing so singularly great as can never be brought too often to our minds, and it offers itself now with additional reasons of gratitude.

Such are the dismal effects of war, that
 it

it ought never to be undertaken except in cases the most clear and urgent, in necessary self-defence, and when submission would entail upon us and our posterity the galling yoke of oppression. To engage for slight injuries and affronts, is wickedly to hearken to the dictates of pride, and foolishly to plunge ourselves, by this ill-judged remedy, into great and lasting evils.* The rules which the Prince of Peace hath given, apply to nations as well as to individuals. *If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.† If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between*

* I find that in several thanksgiving sermons delivered on February 19th, 1795, the above sentiment, and many others in this discourse, are strongly enforced. "War," says Dr. M'Knight, "is a dreadful calamity, and a nation ought never to be involved in it, but in cases of absolute necessity."—"Of all wars those which are intestine are most to be dreaded and deprecated."

† Matt. v. 40.

between thee and him alone. With respect to nations he hath given us, in illustration of a certain point, what will be ever found not only duty, but the soundest policy. What king, saith he, going to war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth, whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.†*

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* Matt. xviii. 15.

† Luke xiv. 31, 32.

These precepts of our blessed Lord are not to be construed as enjoining passive obedience and non-resistance, but as enjoining patience under injuries, forgiveness of them, a desire of reconciliation, and a proper regard to our own safety. Revenge is no more allowable between nations than between individuals; and, if by seeking revenge we destroy ourselves, we add folly to wickedness. Just and beautiful are these words of Dr. Smith on the last thanksgiving: “ Shall we, in
“ pursuing either reparation or revenge, inflict tenfold
“ injuries on our own country? It is lawful, say they,
“ it is laudable to detest, and to nurse in the hearts of
“ our children, a military rage against a nation that has

It has been proposed long ago, that when nations cannot amicably compose their differences among themselves, they should submit to the arbitration of others. When mankind shall be more influenced by the spirit of the Gospel, we hope that this happy æra will commence, and which is so agreeable to the principles of every good republican. Then, instead of the kingly trade of butchering one another to gratify diabolical passions, the human race will dwell together as brethren of the same family.

It is certain that we have been in imminent

“ been willing to destroy us. This maxim, my brethren, is contrary to the spirit of our holy religion. But, religion apart---be it as they will---let every American have been led by his father, like Hannibal, to the altar, to swear eternal hatred against the enemy of his country---should he not, like Hannibal, wait the proper moment to avenge her wrongs? Should he not at least be compelled by necessity alone to wage a disadvantageous war?”

nent danger of war with a nation with
 which we once successfully contended, and
 whose arrogance and power are still per-
 mitted as a scourge to the earth. What-
 ever may have been the means to prevent,
 or even delay hostilities, we must say that
 the Lord, who formerly delivered us,
 hath been again our shield and defence.
 He hath ordained peace for us. *He doeth
 according to his will in the army of heaven,
 and among the inhabitants of the earth.
 The hearts of kings are in his hand, and
 he turneth them as the rivers of water are
 turned.**

Peace

* Mr. Mason, in his thanksgiving sermon, gives an
 affecting description of the complicated evils of war,
 and in one place says, " We stand astonished at the
 " precipice over which we were nearly hurried---a pre-
 " cipice that would have plunged us into evils for which
 " their immediate authors could never have atoned:
 " no, not though they wept in sackcloth the remainder
 " of their lives: no, not though their heads were waters,
 " and their eyes fountains of tears---tears streaming in
 " perpetual succession, and every drop embittered with
 " the gall of heart-wringing penitence."

Peace will be enhanced when we compare our condition with that of nations abroad. In Europe, what mighty armies are in the field! What confusion, devastation, and bloodshed! Who, at this day, would leave his habitation here for the most fertile spot in Austria? Who would exchange what is settled and peaceful for what is uncertain and mixed with the horrors of war? Why are we thus distinguished? All the praise is due to the Sovereign of nations.

Let us not forbear to remark here the Divine goodness, in making America independent on any foreign power. Had she remained in such a connection, she must have necessarily been involved in great distresses. Her revenues must have been exhausted, her coasts destroyed, and her blood lavished, and all to humour the accursed ambition of those whom God, in
his

hath permitted, for several years, some savage tribes of the wilderness to lay waste our infant settlements. He hath granted them victory more than once, and left our citizens to perish by their merciless hands. At length he hath inclined them to peace. On the last thanksgiving, this event was anticipated; it is now made sure, and ought to swell our notes of praise to the King of nations. Only those who have been exposed to the cruelty of the savage natives can conceive the affliction, and duly appreciate the deliverance.

There is too much reason to believe that they were encouraged by those who contemplated them as allies, in case of war; but this encouragement being happily withdrawn by accommodation, the Indians have the more readily hearkened to terms, and sought to recline on the bosom of peace. It is devoutly to be wished, that they

they could be brought to civilized life, and that missionaries could be sent to diffuse among them human and divine knowledge. Then would they bury the hatchet, and as part of the glorious Mediator's kingdom, join with us in singing, *O praise the Lord all ye nations: praise him all ye people.*

THIRDLY, Let me mention as a cause of gratitude, that the Lord hath "constantly favored us with fruitful seasons." Not only has this country never been distressed with famine, but the land has yielded abundant increase. We have had wherewith to supply others. This year God hath blessed the labour of the husbandman; and such is the variety of climate, and the fertility of soil, that we may justly adopt, in general, these words of the Psalmist: *Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it.—Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly;*

*abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blestest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness; and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the vallies also are covered over with corn: they shout for joy, they also sing.**

FOURTHLY, The Lord hath blessed us “with the civilizing light and influence of his holy Gospel.” This is to be marked as a principal thing in which *his merciful kindness is great towards us*. To avoid religious persecution, our forefathers fled to this new world; they carried the Gospel with them, and it has prospered ever since. Liberty, as to articles of belief and modes of worship, has been always allowed; and since our happy revolution, *this*

* Psalm lxxv, 9---13.

this has been peculiarly the case. The unchristian intolerance which some were disposed to assume, from their connection with established churches abroad, has been destroyed, and all put upon the same foundation. No preference, no superiority is admissible, but what arises from learning, piety, and zeal. Here, and here only, has truth an equal advantage with error, and must obtain an eternal victory.

Not to enlarge on the effect which the Gospel has in civilizing a people, correcting their morals, and making them good citizens, of what avail would all temporal advantages be separated from the hope of a blessed immortality hereafter? Does the Christian religion afford the best rules for human conduct? and does it besides reveal to us the way in which our guilt can be pardoned, and our depravity removed? Are we favored with this, while others
are

are buried in superstition or idolatry? What an unspeakable privilege! What cause of praise to the Almighty Father who hath made us to differ!

It is true, that the flood of infidelity which has overwhelmed part of Europe, has, in some measure, affected us; but, as a nation, we have not cast off the profession of the Christian religion. The ordinances of the Gospel are enjoyed and attended. O that God would make us thankful for this distinguishing favor! that he would destroy error and delusion, and copiously pour out upon us his holy Spirit! I mention,

LASTLY, That the Lord hath, in his merciful kindness, removed the sickness which has been so “fatal to the lives of
“many in our principal city, and in sundry
“dry places of this and other states.” This
has

has been reserved for the last particular, because it was, no doubt, a principal cause of our solemn thanksgiving, especially at so early a day. From the extent of the mortal disease, and the alarms and embarrassments which attended it, it is to be considered as a national judgment, and the removal of it as a national blessing.

Several things present themselves here, for which to praise the Lord. The calamity, taken in itself, was not of the most grievous kind, and such as our sins deserved. When David was offered his choice of war, famine, and pestilence, he chose the last. *Let us, said he, fall now into the hand of the Lord, (for his mercies are great) and let me not fall into the hand of man.** Of these three judgments war is certainly the most dreadful, and often brings the others in its train. By the neg-

* 2 Sam. xxiv. 14.

lect of agriculture, and the desolation which is made, a scarcity of provisions is necessarily produced; and in war malignant distempers are generated, so that it is not unusual for more to perish by these than by the sword. Let it be added too, that war not only destroys the bodies, but has a most baneful influence on the morals of men. Famine and pestilence tend to awaken them to a sense of their sins, and dispose them to receive religious impressions; but war inflames wicked passions, and leads to a general corruption. This is lamentably the case in all internal dissensions, or what are called civil wars. That nation is accursed of God which is thus given up.*

We

* “ Experience, that faithful monitor, has shewn
 “ that the wounds inflicted by civil war are far deeper,
 “ and of more difficult cure, than any that can be received
 “ ed from the hand of foreign violence. The murderous
 “ tempers which, in other wars, are indulged, in
 “ this are wrought up to the height of fury. Resentments
 “ are more keen, revenge more implacable, and
 “ hatred more lasting,” &c. Mr. Mason’s sermon.

sion of an enemy, our houses of worship a desolation, our land drenched with our dearest blood, and every thing alarm, confusion and dismay? Can we have forgotten the day on which peace returned, how we were transported with joy, and hymned the eternal King who gave us victory, and turned away the battle from our gates? We have not forgotten these things, for yesterday we celebrated them; and may every returning anniversary find America cultivating the arts of peace!*

AGAIN, The sickness with which the Lord hath afflicted us, was not so general, and so mortal, as we had reason to fear. This city did not suffer in the degree which a sister city did a few years ago. Here the dispersion was not so great. Here public

* The thanksgiving was on the day following the anniversary of the evacuation of New-York by the British troops.

lic worship on the Lord's day was regularly continued, besides those evenings on which we assembled to pour out our hearts to God, that he would "stay the hand of the destroying angel." Those were evenings which ought long to be remembered, when God graciously admitted us near to his mercy-seat, and enabled us to order our cause before him. Here the deaths were comparatively small. Though we deplore the loss of some in this congregation, and weep with those who weep, yet we miss fewer than was to have been expected. In common years there have been more bereavements, and more tokens of mourning seen among us.*

But,

* The most accurate account makes the number of deaths, during the sickness, to be seven hundred and forty-six, from the 26th of July till the 5th of November. The most alarming mortality was on the 25th and 26th of September, when thirty-one died on each day. In Philadelphia, in the year 1793, there died, in the same space of time, on the most moderate computation, four thousand; and on one single day the number of deaths amounted to one hundred and nineteen.

But, the malady is now entirely removed. Health is restored; the dispersed have returned; business has revived. *O Praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great towards us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord.*

ON a review of these causes of thanksgiving, may we not, my brethren, indeed say, that the Lord hath “given to us a “greater portion of public welfare and “prosperity than to any other people?” Look abroad, and point us to a nation equally favored. What would we have that we have not? Our governments, general and particular, have the most excellencies, and the fewest defects of any now in the world. We feel that we are free in our civil and religious concerns; that our persons and property are safe from the lawless and disobedient. Our new settlements

tlements are rapid and extensive. The wilderness is made to blossom as the rose. The old cities increase, and new ones spring up. The land yields abundance, and is intersected with spacious rivers for the convenience of mutual intercourse. Our merchantmen go to the ends of the earth, and return laden with the richest treasures. Schools and colleges are instituted in every quarter for the instruction of our youth. The Gospel of the blessed Jesus is constantly proclaimed in our ears. What heart so depraved as to despise these many and great favors? Who would not weep, if ingratitude to the beneficent Donor, if wild ambition, or the pestilence of party, should, in one unhappy hour, rob us of all these enchanting prospects? Our political horizon has been unclouded; the sun has shone bright, and the gales have been gentle and refreshing; but, if irregular passions be permitted to rage in our breasts,

soon

soon will the dawn be overcast, and gather into darkness, and blackness, and tempest. It is ordered in Divine Providence, that nations seldom enjoy such a length of prosperity as we have; and when we consider the return which we have made to God, and the present aspect of our affairs, we will see that it becomes us to *rejoice with trembling*.*

It

* “ I see, with infinite regret, that obstinate factions
 “ are beginning to be formed. To what degree they
 “ may proceed in decomposing and dissolving the pre-
 “ sent harmonious system, can be known only to God
 “ and to posterity. But, next to slavery, I deprecate
 “ its dissolution as the worst of evils. If we would
 “ effectually guard against it, we ought to be no less
 “ cautious of weakening the federal government, than
 “ vigilant against the insidious approaches of tyranny.”
 Dr. Smith’s sermon.

The following words of Dr. McKnight, in his sermon, were very judicious and seasonable, and they apply with greater force now than when delivered: “ As
 “ a mean of securing the continuance and increase of
 “ the goodness of God to you, let me caution you
 “ against the influence of faction and party. Beware
 “ of the man who is artful and industrious in exciting
 “ your prejudices, and inflaming your passions. Whilst

It would afford a subject for a seasonable discourse, and would not be improper on this very day, to inquire what those sins are with which God hath been displeased. It would not be improper, because our gratitude is never sincere unless we seek reformation. If we have suffered public judgments, there must be public sins which have occasioned them; for God *doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*

This, however, would lead to an enumeration and discussion too long at present.

Other-

“ the public good is made the ostensible, pride, ambition, and interest are generally the real motives by which the leaders of party are influenced.”

“ We must manifest our gratitude by esteeming, and supporting, and obeying the government under which we live; by suppressing in ourselves and in others all unreasonable surmises, jealousies, murmurs and complaints against it; by rightly valuing and endeavoring to preserve the national peace,” &c. Dr. Green’s sermon.

Otherwise, I would venture to speak out my heart, convinced that no man need fear when he is shielded by truth, and is conscious of seeking the glory of God, and the best happiness of men. Suffer me only to say, and I beseech you to receive it with affection, that the calumny and abuse which prevail, to whatever source we trace them, are offensive to the God of truth. Actions the most disinterested and magnanimous are construed into ambitious artifice. Nothing so sacred, and no persons so dignified and useful as not to be exposed to ridicule and contempt. The favorable reception which such publications seem to have in the community, is a symptom of great degeneracy.

Can any of us seriously believe, that a man can be found among us who, if disposed, would dare to betray the interests of this country? Thousands of gleamy swords
would

would leap from their scabbards to immolate on the altar of freedom this prodigy of folly and wickedness. Can the man who toiled and fought for years to secure our liberty and independence; the man whom unanimous suffrage raised to the first seat in our new government; the man who has long since arrived at the summit of fame; the man who is the admiration and envy of the world; the man to whom crowns and sceptres would be empty baubles; the man with whose virtues future historians shall blazon their page, and all generations shall arise to call blessed; can such a man betray us? 'Tis impossible. 'Tis too like the whisper of misguided zeal, of discontent, or of malevolence. 'Tis a tale too much calculated to undermine, and to bring into disrepute all republican governments.

Flattery in any man, and in any place,
is base. It is basest of all in a minister,

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and from the pulpit. But it ought to be distinguished from that just praise to which public and eminent services are entitled; especially when attempts are made to bring these services into disrespect. It ought to be distinguished from that support which a Christian people owe to their government; and with which the reputation of executive officers is inseparably connected. Who will serve us, if obloquy be the reward? Few men have magnanimity enough to leave peace and independence, to encounter cabal and faction. Few men are capable of conceiving the magnanimity in exchanging the pleasant groves and flowers of Vernon for thorns and briars.*

My

* The following is the conclusion of that beautiful eulogy by Dr. Smith, in his eloquent sermon: "I esteem it one of our chief mercies, and I count it one of the noblest acts of patriotism in him to forsake his secure situation on the summit of fame, to accept the dubious helm of government, and, for the good of his country, to put to risk a reputation which history assured to him, untarnished and immortal." Mr. Ma-

My brethren, I love liberty as well as any of you, and have now exercised it. Being of no party, and having no personal interest to promote, nothing but a regard for the honor and happiness of the American nation has extorted these observations. I may be condemned by my best friends; I may be reproached by my enemies, if such there be; but I reply to both in the words of the Apostle; *With me it is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord.**

MANY

son, when speaking of the suppression of the western insurrection, says, with his usual accuracy and energy, "Above all, our eyes involuntarily fasten on THAT MAN, whose timely application of the severe, but salutary discipline entrusted to his prudence, was the happy mean of restoring peace.---ON THAT MAN, whom God hath honored to be the instrument of countless blessings to this land; whose name will live, and whose memory will be revered, when the blighting eye of malignity is sealed up in darkness; and the tongue of calumny fettered with the irons of death."

* Such has been the abuse, for some time past, of public characters, that every friend to virtue and good

MANY reflections which were originally intended, and would be profitable in the conclusion of this subject, shall be omitted. Let me intreat you, my brethren, in brief, carefully to mark and abstain from those sins which have provoked the Divine anger. Without obedience to the laws of God, the judgments which we have felt are

order is bound to bear his testimony against it. How few soever the authors of this abuse may be, the currency of it shows the depravity of our taste and manners, and degrades us in the eyes of foreigners. To a fair discussion of measures, there can be no objection; but to substitute railing for argument, and to impute, without foundation, sinister designs to the constituted authorities, is to turn our liberty into licentiousness. The writer of this would not be surprized to find himself charged with a change of sentiment, and with being an enemy to liberty; though he dares to challenge any to the proof by all that he has ever said or written. He took a decided part in the late revolution; he is a republican in principle; he is an unchangeable friend to the French nation; and he believes, at the same time, that he is perfectly consistent, as a man, as a citizen, and as a Christian, in submitting to the government of his country, and condemning the unjust abuse which is cast upon it.

are the forerunners of others, and more severe. *I will hear, says the Psalmist, what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly.**

As to the late sickness, the lessons it teaches, and the improvement to be made, I have so fully pointed out on the evenings of prayer, that little remains to be said. Remember that death is the unavoidable lot of all men. It may be delayed, but it will surely come. *Use, then, this world as not abusing it; make now your peace with God through Christ, that so you may be happy when all human scenes are passed away forever.*

As to our national concerns, let us be thankful for our present prosperity; let us pray for, and by every mean in our power, promote

* Psalm lxxxv. 8.

promote its continuance; let us extend our desires, that the present revolutions may terminate in universal peace, liberty and happiness. The Lord hath done great things for us, and we are encouraged to put our trust in him. He can with infinite ease disperse the clouds which seem to threaten, or cause them to break with blessings on our heads. Whatever may be the course of things; whether the Sovereign of the universe shall afflict or prosper us, O SAVE MY COUNTRY, HEAV'N, SHALL BE MY LAST!



(Linn's discourse, & an appendix upon the Epidemic)

Robert Draper Esq.

of

John B. Cat

